

The Pastor's Notebook

Recently Linda and I saw the movie, “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story,” a fine addition to the Star Wars saga, and we enjoyed meeting a whole new cast of characters, but I was most impressed by a fellow named, Chirrut Imwe. Not a Jedi like Luke Skywalker, he is a blind “warrior monk” who happens to be sensitive to “The Force.” Whenever he is in a stressful position or in the midst of battle, he repeats a short mantra, a meditative saying, for focus and protection – “I am one with the Force; the Force is with me.” Instead of allowing himself to be overcome by fear he finds that his faith in the Force is able to keep him strong and provide power to meet the challenge.

Watching Chirrut receive such confidence and strength through his faith reminded me of how Christians are called to do the same – we’re called to seek the presence of the Holy Spirit when we’re facing a mighty challenge or when our knees knock with fear, and we’re told that the Spirit will give us the resolve and confidence to move forward instead of shrink back. An ancient Christian prayer called the Jesus Prayer is quite similar to that of Chirrut’s and has been used by disciples for centuries for this very purpose. – “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Much like Chirrut’s prayer, the Jesus Prayer is meant to be repeated again and again both before a challenge and in the midst of it to keep the heart and mind focused on God so that one’s faith becomes so deep that fear has no place to do its work.

While some might find this kind of prayer unappealing or even unbiblical, Paul reminds us that we are to “pray without ceasing,” and such a prayer can train the mind and heart to such a degree that we, as one ancient Christian teacher put it, “become prayer.”

This new year will present myriad challenges to be sure and we might be tempted to back away from them fearfully, after all, we’re not Jedi knights. But with hearts focused on the “real Force,” and spirits empowered by the living Spirit of God,

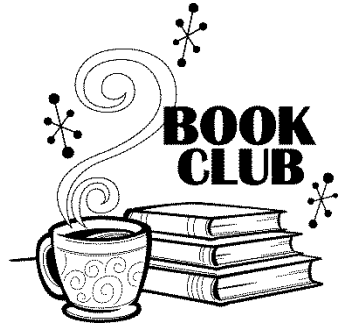
we can move forward with confidence that God is with us, and if God is for us who can be against us. Have a blessed month, friends!

Pastor Tom

News from the Book Club!

Book Club will meet Friday, February 17th, at 7:30 p.m. at Panera's in the South Park Shops. We will discuss *A Man Called Ove* Fredrik Backman. Here is a description of the book from Amazon.com:

“Meet Ove. He’s a curmudgeon—the kind of man who points at people he dislikes as if they were burglars caught outside his bedroom window. He has staunch principles, strict routines, and a short fuse. Behind the cranky exterior there is a story and a sadness. So when one November morning a chatty young couple with two chatty young daughters move in next door and accidentally flatten Ove’s mailbox, it is the lead-in to a comical and heartwarming tale of unkempt cats, unexpected friendship, and the ancient art of backing up a U-Haul. All of which will change one cranky old man and a local residents’ association to their very foundations.”



Join us for a discussion of the book. Even if you haven't read the book, the book club is always a great place to pick up recommendations about books that others are reading. Also, the club is always open to suggestions for new books to read. New members are always welcome. And, anyone who has an interest in a particular book is welcome to join us.

The 2017 ASP Theme is “LOVE IN ACTION”

by Gloria Stephan

Just as I finished putting all the Christmas decorations away, and the winter wind was howling outside, I received an email about the



ASP Theme for Summer 2017. The theme is “Love in Action” and it is based on 1 John 3:18 which says “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

I thought how fitting it was to receive this information just after the season of remembering how God gave us Jesus as a baby born in a lowly stable. God sent his son to live and serve among us, not only with words, but with love in action.

Tim Bomgardner, Director of Spiritual Programming for ASP explains that “Christ calls us to move beyond our words, to show our LOVE IN ACTION. It’s not enough to recognize those around us that are in need; we must serve others through the good works that God has set out before us.”

This summer, come be a part of a movement in Central Appalachia that speaks louder than words, put your LOVE IN ACTION with us! You can put on your work jeans, grab some tools and be in relationship with others for a week as you repair homes for families in Perry County, Kentucky. We plan to send at least 21 volunteers this year.

Our trip is scheduled for Sunday, June 18 – Saturday, June 24 and WE NEED YOU!

Registration forms are available in the church narthex and you can get more information by contacting me at gstephan57@gmail.com or checking out the ASP website at www.ASPHome.org. Be a part of LOVE IN ACTION.

An Update from the MARTHA CIRCLE -

Many thanks to our members for a successful 2016. A collection was taken at our December Christmas party and distribution of it will be decided in the near future.

We are very grateful for our church and support it with our volunteering in many ways, such as helping with the Shepherds' gifts, assisting Pastor Tom when needed and all other church volunteer work that needs done. Our members are reminded each time we meet how important they are to the church.



We will be selecting new prayer partners at our February 8th meeting.

As we remember that "love" was born at Christmas, our prayers are to keep that love with us as we work for our Lord. Peace, joy and blessings to all throughout 2017.

- Donna Hennen

Bible Study for Today's Fast Lifestyle

The outstanding Disciple Bible Study returns with a new "Fast



Track" format with shorter meetings and less reading Wednesdays at 7:00 pm. Drawing closer to Lent, isn't it time to act on your interest in the

Bible. Resolve to know the scriptures more fully and discover the amazing transformative power of God in your life, Now's the time to study the Bible! There are morning sessions on Thursdays at 10:00 am, too!

Providing proof

The great Christian theologian, William Barclay, writes, “If we are to accept the teaching of Jesus at all, then the only test of the reality of a man’s religion is his attitude to his fellow men. The only possible proof that a man loves God is the demonstrated fact that he loves his fellow men.”

Pure Love for Jesus

Jesus has always many who love his heavenly kingdom, but few who bear his cross. He has many who desire consolation, but few who care for trial. He finds many to share his table, but few to take part in his fasting. All desire to be happy with him; few wish to suffer anything for him. Many follow him to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of his passion. Many revere his miracles; few approach the shame of the cross. Many love him as long as they encounter no hardship; many praise and bless him as long as they receive some comfort from him. ...

Those, on the contrary, who love Jesus for his own sake and not for any comfort of their own, bless him in all trial and anguish of heart as well as in the bliss of consolation. ... What power there is in pure love for Jesus — love that is free from all self-interest and self-love!

– Thomas a Kempis

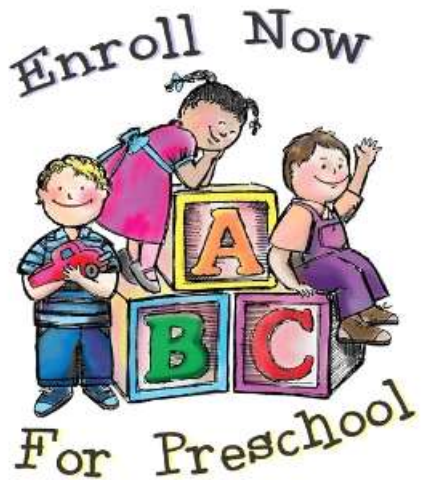
Souper Bowl Sunday!



Well, the Steelers won’t be in the Super Bowl this year, but that doesn’t mean we can’t help others like champions!! The Outreach Committee will be collecting cans of soup on Super Bowl Sunday, February 5 during both worship services! Help your neighbors by bringing in soup that will be distributed through the food pantry at SHIM.

Kings School Kids

Preschool Registration
Is Going On Now
For The
2017-2018
School Year



Please contact the
Kings School Kids Office at
412-835-6141
For More Information



Hurry!!
Classes Fill Fast



Life is too
Short!



Join the Fun on
Fat Tuesday

February 28th

7:00 pm

Bring a Finger Food to share
(snack, appetizer or dessert)
and enjoy an evening of Fun & Fellowship

Sign up in the Narthex or
call 412-835-6141

To make your
reservations!!!!





Thank You
Thank You
Thank You!!!!

Robin Cecala

and

Gloria Stephan

For Getting the Kings School Kids

New Web Site up and Running!

Check us Out

@Kingsschoolkids.org

“When I say it's you I like, I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive.

Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed.”

— Fred Rogers

Library News!

OUT OF THE DEPTHS I CRIED by *Christopher L. Bishop* of the First Bethel congregation is a step-by-step guide to managing depression. It's now in the Church Library. Chris, who was diagnosed in 2014 with major depression, PTSD and SAD (seasonal affective disorder – winter blues, etc.), wrote this 402-page book as he went through the recovery process. He recommends a daily action plan, relaxation exercises and explains how prayer can help a person grow through depression. Chris completes the book with his own story, saying it “will be cathartic” for him to write it out and that others might learn from it. “I only put it at the end, though,” he writes, “because I’m more interested in getting you better than telling my own story.” Reviewers called the book inspirational. One said it is a “great book from someone who actually experienced what they are writing about.”



HILLBILLY ELEGY: A MEMOIR OF A FAMILY AND CULTURE IN CRISIS is described by its publisher as “a probing look at the struggles of America’s white working class.” The author is *J.D. Vance*, who escaped what seemed to be a dead-end existence in a dying Ohio steel town and went on to become a Yale-educated lawyer. Vance tells how his family suffered through poverty, drugs and domestic violence. He explores the anger and frustrations of people who don’t trust political leaders and the media -- and no longer believe in the American dream. The *New York Times* said Vance’s 2016 bestseller, now in our Library,

is “essential reading for this moment in history.” *Library Journal* said it is “well-suited to anyone interested in a study of modern America.”

LIVING ALONE WITHOUT BEING LONELY is one of our Library’s many *CareNotes*. Like all of these free eight-page booklets, it offers much advice that may be helpful to a person in need. Living alone, it says, can be a hardship or an adventure, depending “on your attitude and your decisions.” The *CareNotes* display is on the Library window sill. Please help yourself.

- Your Library Staff



Taize Prayer Service

For the last several decades thousands of Christians and seekers from all parts of the world have experienced the presence of God in fresh and replenishing ways through the contemplative worship services that have grown out of the Protestant monastic community in Taize, France.

Now First Bethel Church is offering a 55-minute Taize Prayer Service beginning Tuesday, March 15 at 7:00 p.m. In the softly candlelit sanctuary, those who gather will have opportunities to experience the presence of God through meditative music, Scripture readings and moments of silence and reflection. The Taizé service is a wonderful way to experience inner stillness and peace in the midst of so much outer activity. There’s no sermon or offering taken – rather it seeks to create a place of peace within our hearts for God to dwell and speak. All are invited!

Coffee, Tea, Music, Art & Worship!

Our next Coffeehouse Worship Service, featuring talented singer Jessica Best and others will be on **February 4 at 6 pm in Founders Hall!** Enjoy this casual gathering of talented musicians, artists and those interested in a unique worship experience. Would you like to help provide beverages and snacks? See Pastor Tom today! Bring a friend! The Coffeehouse meets on the first Saturday of every month!



Take care

In Jimmy Fallon's first monologue as host of NBC's *The Tonight Show*, he expressed thanks to all past hosts. On an occasion when he might have said, "And now this stage is mine!" or "I'm delighted to be counted among such greats," instead he stated with deep humility, "I just want to do the best I can and take care of this show for a while."

Take care of. That's language not of ownership but of stewardship. That's the language of Genesis 2:15 — "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and *take care of it.*"

What have we been called to "take care of for a little while"? The earth, surely. Perhaps a congregation, a business, a neighbor in need, a volunteer or an employee. A child, who may need less care — or different forms of it — as time goes on. We don't own these people and things. God invites us to be stewards of them, to care for them, to use wisely and value these precious gifts ... and someday, to pass them on to others.

You Are Cherished

We must understand that God does not “love” us without liking us — through gritted teeth — as “Christian” love is sometimes thought to do. Rather, out of the eternal freshness of his perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all his creatures is the natural outflow of what he is to the core — which we vainly try to capture with our tired but indispensable old word “love.”

- Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

The Cost of Hiding Our Light

A Los Angeles restaurant owner recently discovered that a neon light had been covered — without being disconnected first — during a construction project 77 years prior. The calculated electricity cost to run the hidden light all that time was \$17,000!

People don't intentionally hide light; that would be counterproductive, not to mention wasteful. Yet when we shrink back from sharing Jesus' good news, we do indeed hide “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) that is in us. When we're too modest to use God-given talents such as singing, playing piano or reading to bring others joy, we hide our light. When we put our own wants ahead of meeting someone else's needs through giving and serving, we hide the light of God's love. And at what cost?



“Let your light shine before others,” Jesus says, “that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (verse 16).



PUZZLE

Love your neighbor as yourself

Valentine's Day is the perfect opportunity to live out God's love.
How does Jesus say we should treat other people?

*Directions: Find a hidden word in each sentence. For example, "the" is hidden here:
(12) "It's Harry's hat he stole." The (12) means the hidden word starts on the 12th
letter (ignore punctuation). Use the answers to complete Matthew 19:19, NIV.*

- (1) You really like ice cream! _____
- (16) Carly has a really fat hermit crab. _____
- (21) My favorite animals are moth, ermine and eels. _____
- (4) "Hello, Vera!" called Joseph. _____
- (11) When horses neigh, boredom reigns. _____
- (17) Their daughter, Kara, sat patiently. _____
- (6) "That's yours, elf!" the fairy yelled. _____



"Honor _____ and
_____, and _____ your



_____."

Matthew 19:19, NIV

Answer: "Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 19:19, NIV

What's It All About?

Life isn't about keeping score. It's not about how many people call you and it's not about who you've dated, are dating or haven't dated at all. It isn't about who you've kissed, what sport you play, or which guy or girl likes you. It's not about your shoes or your hair or the color of your skin or where you live or go to school. In fact, it's not about grades, money, clothes, or colleges that accept you or not. Life isn't about if you have lots of friends, or if you're alone, and it's not about how accepted or unaccepted you are. Life just isn't about that.



But life is about who you love and who you hurt. It's about how you feel about yourself. It's about trust, happiness and compassion. It's about sticking up for your friends and replacing inner hate with love.

Life is about avoiding jealousy, overcoming ignorance and building confidence. It's about what you say and what you mean. It's about seeing people for who they are and not what they have.

Most of all, it is about choosing to use your life to touch someone else's in a way that could never have been achieved otherwise. These choices are what life's about.

—Katie Leicht,

“It's not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something. May I suggest that it be creating joy for others, sharing what we have for the betterment of personkind, bringing hope to the lost and love to the lonely.”

— Leo Buscaglia